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ABSTRACT

Analysis of beginning second language textbooks for German, Swedish, English, and Finnish looked at the readability of the contents. Finnish and English texts are examined more closely here as illustrations of the problems found in all four languages. Specific passages are cited and discussed; two are appended. A general framework of text linguistics was used for the analysis, focusing on grammatical and thematic coherence, textual theme, and communicative function. It is concluded that the texts are, in general, artificial and unnecessarily difficult for the language learner. A suggestion for avoiding these problems is to use authentic texts or to construct texts so that linguistic and pragmatic functions are combined. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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TEXTS IN STUDY BOOKS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt is made to show some problems concerning text construction in textbooks for children as well as for grown-ups beginning to learn German, English, Swedish or Finnish as a foreign language. Methods worked out by textlinguists will be used to analyse some samples chosen from different textbooks. Authors of textbooks for beginners have often forgotten to take into account the dimension of situation when constructing their texts. The lack of the dimension of situation, however, leads to some characteristic traits on the level of text which are typical for the texttype 'text in textbooks for beginners'. These characteristics make it difficult for beginners as well as for more advanced learners to understand the texts, because they have not only to fight with words and grammar but also to create a communicative situation in texts in which signals pointing towards the communicative situations are missing.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Objective

In the present paper texts taken from textbooks for beginners of foreign languages will be analysed to show why it is often difficult even for native speakers to understand the texts. The analysis will be based on textlinguistic conceptions as developed by Brinker (1985).

1.2. Definitions

Communication takes place only in texts (see Schmidt 1976: 75ff; Arndt 1985:76; Viehwager 1985: 29ff.). Texts are the constitutive medium in which we communicate when speaking, writing or reading. Oral or written texts therefore are the basic category in which we communicate when learning foreign languages. To quote Viehwager (1985:30):

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> 1. Texte sind die originäre Form sprachlicher Kommunikation. Wenn Menschen miteinander kommunizieren, wenn sie sprachlich handeln, dann sind die Resultate dieser Tätigkeit Texte
> 2. das Lernen mit Texten ist eine der grundlegenden Formen jeder unterrichtlichen wie auch ausserunterrichtlichen Tätigkeit im Fremdsprachenunterricht.

There is no general agreement within textlinguistics as to how to define a text. Here the communicative branch in textlinguistics will be followed which defines a text in the following way:

> Der Terminus 'Text' bezeichnet eine begrenzte Folge von sprachlichen Zeichen, die in sich kohärent ist und die als Ganzes eine erkennbare kommunikative Funktion signalisiert (Grinker 1985:17).

The reference to textbooks for beginners means books which are used during the first years of foreign language teaching. It is typical of the type of textbooks in question that they consist of short texts (often with little or no connection with each other) combined with grammatical explanations, exercises and wordlists. The texts are not taken from authentic sources but are artificially constructed from a grammatical and maybe a pedagogic point of view.

1.3. Material

The material for the present analysis comes from textbooks for beginning learners of German, Swedish, English and Finnish. The linguistic problems found in the artificial texts were similar in all textbooks. It is only for the purposes of illustration that a Finnish text and an English text were chosen for a closer analysis here (see Appendix 1).

1.4. The Method

The method chosen for the analysis of the texts is that of Brinker (1985). Grammatical and thematical coherence, textual theme and textual function (cf. Brinker 1985:26ff.) within the frame of textlinguistics.

2. The Analysis of the Texts

2.1. Grammatical Coherence

Brinker (1985:39) points out that grammatical coherence is of importance for the understanding of a text (see also Viehweger 1985:29). In his opinion grammatical coherence is to be found at the following levels:

- textimmanent, das heisst: Die Beziehung zwischen Bezugsausdruck und wieder aufnehmendem Ausdruck wird im Text selbst hergestellt; sie ist in dieser Form nicht im sprachlichen System verankert.
- sprachimmanent, das heisst: Die Beziehung zwischen Bezugsausdruck und wieder aufnehmendem Ausdruck ist im Sprachsystem verankert.
- sprachtranszendent, das heisst: Die Beziehung zwischen Bezugsausdruck und wiederaufnehmendem Ausdruck transzendiert das Sprachsystem im engeren Sinne und gründet auf enzyklopädischen Erfahrungen und Kenntnissen der Kommunikationspartner, d.h. auf einer 'Semantik' im weitesten Sinn, die das Erfahrungswissen und die Weltkenntnis von Sprecher und Hörer mit einschliesst.

In the Finnish text we can find examples of 'sprachimmanent' coherence as concerns the persons involved: Peter M. and Pirkko Lind, who are introduced in the narrative by their proper names and referred to by means of proforms (hänelle, hän). Local coherence is gained by sequences such as hotellihuone...hotelli. The relations are usually constructed as anaphorical:[1]

> Ystävämme Peter M. on ensi kertaa Helsingissä. Hänellä ei ole vielä hotellihuonetta. Hän menee takaisin hotelli Grandiin. Hän on nyt Keskuskadulla. Sitten taksi kääntyy Keskuskadulta vasemmalle, Esplanadille, ja siinä hotelli jo on.

In the English text the acting persons (except one) are also introduced in the narrative. Coherence in terms of the persons is gained by means of proforms and by repeating the proper names:

> Mr. Cooper, Carol, Lynne, David and J.J. are sitting in a train. They are going to a football match. Lynne has got lemonade, apples, oranges and sandwiches in a big basket. Mr. Cooper is buying tickets ... David and J.J. are shouting and singing.

1 It would be interesting to find out if there are differences in the ways of producing coherent texts in English, German and Finnish.

'Textimmanent' coherence is to be bound, for instance in the Finnish text in sequences such as Helsinki, Keskuskatu, hotelli or huone, lämmintä vettä, puhelin.

In the English text there are sequences such as football-game, tickets, to shout and to sing.

'Sprachtranszendent' coherence in the English text is involved in the formulation 1 adult, 4 children, which refers to the status of the Cooper family. This is supposed to be known by the reader.

Both texts show inconsistencies in coherence which make it difficult for the reader to understand what is going on. In both cases the reason for these difficulties of comprehension is to be found in missing coherence links.

In the second part of the Finnish text we find the following sequences:

> Pirkko Lind on ostoksilla ja katselee hedelmiä. Ihania rypäleitä! - 'Saanko puoli kiloa näitä?' Tuolla on kauniita banaaneja. - 'Antakaa minulle kuusi kappaletta noita. Ja vielä pari sitruunaa.' - 'Voi, niitä meillä ei nyt ole, ne ovat lopussa.' Pirkolle tulee nälkä, hän menee ravintolaan ja tilaa pihvin. Ihana pihvi! Nyt vähän tätä (hän pance suolaa) ja sitten tuota (hän panee pippuria). - 'Haluatteko myös sinappia?' 'Ei kiitos, sitä minä en halua.'

An attempt is made to achieve coherence in terms of the persons acting by a reference to the proper name of Pirkko Lind. The second speaker, the seller, is never introduced. Without any warning we come across with a third speaker, the waiter. Moreover, the text also includes Pirkko's reflections. In this way coherence in terms of the persons acting is lacking, which makes it difficult to understand what is going on.

In the English text there are no similar difficulties but in this text local coherence does not work. In the beginning we are told that the Coopers travel by train. But then the pictures in the book seem to indicate that we are paying for entrance and are shouting inside the stadium. In the text, however, there is no reference to any change of location. There are no references to locations after the very beginning.

The ambiguity in terms of location becomes even more pronounced through the unspecific way in which the man who sells the tickets is referred to. All this makes the construction of the meaning of the passage unnecessarily difficult.

2.1.2. Thematical Coherence

As is pointed out by Brinker, textual coherence is not only gained by means of grammatical coherence: there are also texts which show no means of grammatical coherence but there is no doubt about their being texts (Brinker 1985:38):

> (21) Die Lampe brennt nicht. Die Sicherung ist durchgebrannt.
> (22) Es hat ein Unglück gegeben. Zwei Autos sind zusammengestossen.
> (23) Es war eine regnerische Nacht. Zwei Männer standen in einem Hauseingang und rauchten.

Brinker interprets the sentence in the following way:

> Bei den Satzfolgen (21)-(23) fehlen überhaupt alle syntaktisch-semantischen Verbindungssignale. Wir stufen sie aber ohne Zögern als kohärente Satzfolgen (also als Texte) ein. In Beispiel (21) liegt eine kausale Verknüpfung vor. Den im zweiten Satz beschriebenen Sachverhalt interpretieren wir als Ursache für die im ersten Satz ausgedrückte Proposition. In Beispiel (22) besteht die Verknüpfungsbeziehung in einer 'Spezifizierung des Ausdrucks EIN UNGLÜCK durch die Proposition des zweiten Satzes ('das Unglük bestand darin, dass...'). In Beispiel (23) gibt der erste Satz eine 'Situierung', den situativen. Rahmen für den zweiten.

The very opposite, ie. sentences showing grammatical coherence without being a text, can be found as well:

> (19) Ich habe eine alte Freundin in Hamburg getroffen. Dort gibt es zahlreiche öffentliche Bibliotheken. Diese Bibliotheken wurden von Jungen und Mädchen besucht. Die Jungen gehen oft in Schwimmbäder. Die Schwimmbäder waren im letzten Jahr mehrere Wochen geschlossen. Die Woche hat sieben Tage.
> Die vorliegende (konstruierte) Satzfolge ist durchgehend im Sinne des Prinzips der Wiederaufnahme verknüpft, kann aber trotzdem nicht als kohärent gelten. Das liegt wohl darin begründet, dass kein einheitliches
> Thema erkennbar ist... (Brinker 1985:37-38.)

Brinker thinks that a central element of textuality is 'thematic coherence'. Thematic coherence means that texts contain a 'theme' as the centre of the message. It can be found in the heading or it can be abstracted from the contents of the text. Besides the main theme there can be subthemes which are hierarchically subordinated to the main theme (Ableitungsprinzip). According to Brinker (1985:52), there must be a relationship between the main theme and the communicative function of the text (Kompatibilitätsprinzip).

In the Finnish text, however, thematic coherence is missing. The heading 'Reader' only refers to the function of the text, not to its contents. The Finnish text is divided into two texts (F_1 and F_2), which can

by no means be combined by the principle of the main theme and subthemes. F_1 tells about Peter M's journey to Helsinki, and F_2 about Pirkko Lind doing her shopping. The heading however suggests that F_1 and F_2 are supposed to represent a text. No warning to the learner can be found as to F_1 and F_2 being two different texts on their own right.

There can be no doubt that foreign language learners will be lost, because even more than native speakers they are forced to rely on conventions which they are used to in order to anticipate what they are told in the language they are struggling with.

Even more disruptive is the manner of constructing thematical coherence which does not follow the rules which we are used to when writing a text. F_1 involves conversation which could never take place in the way given.

Figure 1 shows that there are no problems in the narrative parts of the text in question. The dialogue, however, does not work at all. The principle of the main theme and subthemes is observed in the beginning when Peter M. asks for a room having special wishes which are indicated (subtheme 1). The inquiry concerning the place where to change money introduces a new main theme. Peter is told that he can change money in the hotel (main theme 6) but at the same time he is offered a map of the city and given information about where to find shops without having asked for the information given. In everyday life such discourse would be situatively more embedded, or it would seem quite unmotivated because subtheme 2 cannot be subsumed under main theme 6. Main theme 7, however, seems totally unmotivated after the information about changing money in the hotel has been given. Main theme 7 seems to refer to subtheme 3 but no attention is paid to the fact that the problem of how to change money was solved in main theme 6.

It is somewhat problematic that learners of foreign languages are faced with dialogues whose thematic structures do not follow the rules by which discourse is constructed in the languages in question. The problem is that from text structures like those above they have to try and learn how to construct texts in the languages in question.

Peter M. for the first time in Helsinki -----> taxi -----
MAIN THEME 1
MAIN THEME 2
ride to the hotel -------->
MAIN THEME 3
ask for a room
MAIN THEME 4
special wishes -------->
subtheme 1
inquiry concerning money exchange -----> to do so in the hotel
MAIN THEME 5
MAIN THEME 6
offer of a map
Subtheme 2
information where to find shops
Subtheme 3
Inquiry concerning cashing checks in shops
---------->
Negation and end of sequence.
MAIN THEME 7

Figure 1. The narrative structure of the English text.

2.2. Communicative Function

Brinker (1985:77f.) defines communicative function in the following way:

> Unter Anknüpfung an diese allgemeinsprachliche Verwendung des Ausdrucks 'Funktion' kann der Terminus 'Textfunktion' ganz vorläufig definiert werden als der Sinn, den ein Text in einem Kommunikations-
>
> prozess erhält, bzw. als Zweck, den ein Text im Rahmen einer Kommunikationssituation erfüllt. Nun kann ein Text durchaus mehr als eine kommunikative Funktion signalisieren ... Als ... Beispiel sollen die Rundfunknachrichten angeführt werden. Dominant ist zwar die informative Textfunktion: sie besteht darin, dass der Emittent den Hörer über das Vorhandensein eines bestimmten Sachverhalts informiert. Da Nachrichtensendungen aber einen hohen Grad an Beliebtheit besitzen, ist ihnen auch eine gewisse Unterhaltungsfunktion nicht ganz abzusprechen ... Diese Beispiele machen bereits deutlich, dass für einen Text zwar durchaus mehrere Funktionen charakteristisch sein können, dass der Kommunikationsmodus des Textes insgesamt aber in der Regel nur durch eine Funktion bestimmt wird. Diese dominierende Kommunikationsfunktion bezeichnen wir als Textfunktion.

Here we find the reason for coherence breaks in the artificial texts of textbooks for beginning learners of foreign language. The purpose of the texts is to teach the language in question. Thus the heading 'Reader' in the Finnish text only expresses the communicative function of the text. The learner is supposed to read the text, to understand it, and to analyse it linguistically. He is not expected to be interested in Peter M's stay in Helsinki, in Pirkko Lind or in the Coopers. Therefore the texts have only been constructed linguistically. But the writers of the texts have forgotten that authentic texts are built according to the rules of textuality, texts have messages which have to be taken into account and, last but not least, texts are linked with communicative functions.

3. Conclusion

The way out is to use authentic texts or to construct texts in such a way that linguistic and pragmatic functions are combined. It is not difficult at all to teach how to ask questions by sending an Englishman to Lapland or a Finn to London. The Finn will get lost at once, and so he will be forced to learn how to ask questions. The Englishman who 'meni metsään' may have some problems in finding somebody who he can approach in Inari, for instance.

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Appendix 1.

READER

Ystävämme Peter M. on ensi kertaa Helsingissä. Hänellä ei ole vielä hotellihuonetta. Hän menee taksilla hotelli Grandiin. Hän on nyt Keskuskadulla. Sitten taksi kääntyy Keskuskadulta vasemmalle, Esplanadille, ja siinä hotelli jo on. - Onko teillä vapaita yhden hengen huoneita? Huoneessa täytyy olla lämmin vesi ja puhelin. Minulla on paljon hyviä ystäviä täällä ja haluaisin soittaa heille. - Meillä on pari vapaata huonetta, sanoo portieeri. Ensimmäisessä kerroksessa on yksi, mutta se on kadun puolella, se ei ehkä ole oikein rauhallinen. Mutta kuudennessa kerroksessa on myös vapaa huone, numero 692. - Se kuudennen kerroksen huone on ehkä parempi. - Jos haluatte, voin kyllä näyttää teille nämä huoneet. - Kiitos, mutta sanokaa minulle ensin, voitteko te vaihtaa minulle Suomen rahan? Minulla on vain Englannin puntia. - Voimme kyllä. Saatte meiltä myös kaupungin kartan. Ottakaa vain kartta tältä pöydältä, ennen kuin lähdette ostoksille. Aivan lähellä hotellia on paljon suuria liikkeitä ja tavarataloja. - Entä vaihtavatko kaikki liikkeet matkashekkejä? - Muutamat kyllä, mutta ehkä on paras vaihtaa ne täällä tai pankissa.

Pirkko Lind on ostoksilla ja katselee hedelmiä. Ihania rypäleitä! - "Saanko puoli kiloa näitä?" Tuolla on kauniita banaaneja. - "Antakaa minulle kuusi kappaletta noita. Ja vielä pari sitruunaa." - "Voi, niitä meillä ei nyt ole, ne ovat lopussa." Pirkolle tulee nälkä, hän menee ravintolaan ja tilaa pihvin. Ihana pihvi! Nyt vähän tätä (hän panee suolaa) ja sitten tuota (hän panee pippuria). - "Haluatteko myös sinappia?" - "Ei kiitos, sitä minä en halua."

(Aaltio 1969:83.)

18

THE FOOTBALL MATCH

Mr Cooper, Carol, Lynne, David and J.J. are sitting in a train. They are going to a football match. Lynne has got lemonade, apples, oranges and sandwiches in a big basket.

Mr Cooper is buying tickets.

Mr Cooper: One adult and four children, please.
Man: How old are you?
J.J: Eleven.
Man: You are very tall.
J.J: Yes, I am. But I am eleven.
Man: Hm... All right. That is £1.80, please.
Mr Cooper: Here you are.
Man: Thank you.

David and J.J. are shouting and singing:

1, 2, 3, 4,
Who is it we're shouting for?
E-N-G-L-A-N-D, England!

Webster 1979:24

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